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The Enemy of the Good: Supererogation and Requiring Perfection

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Abstract: Moral theories that demand that we do what is morally best leave no room for the supererogatory. One argument against such theories is that they fail to realize the value of autonomy: supererogatory acts allow for the exercise of autonomy because their omissions are not accompanied by any threats of sanctions, unlike obligatory ones. While this argument fails, I use the distinction it draws—between omissions of obligatory and supererogatory acts in terms of appropriate sanctions—to draw a parallel with psychological perfectionism. Through this parallel, I demonstrate that *requiring* what is morally best is in fact counter-productive. Thus, by its own lights, a theory that wants us to do what is best ought at the very least to tell us to believe that some actions are supererogatory. As the old adage goes, the best is the enemy of the good; I argue here that the supererogatory is the solution.

Keywords: Autonomy, Obligation, Psychological Perfectionism, Supererogation, Voluntariness

INTRODUCTION

Saving strangers from burning buildings, kidney donation, gift giving, favours: these acts—large and small—make the world a better place, yet they are not things we normally take ourselves to be morally *required* to do. They are supererogatory. At the heart of every account of supererogation is the same core idea: supererogatory actions are morally good (more specifically, morally better than alternative permissible actions) but not required. Thus, two conditions must be fulfilled for an ethical theory to be compatible with the existence of supererogatory actions: (i) there are actions that

are neither morally required nor morally forbidden (I shall call these actions "optional"), and (ii) some optional actions are better than others.

While the acts that we think of as supererogatory make up both ordinary and extraordinary parts of our moral lives, some classic moral theories do not make space for these two features. For there to be conceptual room for supererogatory acts, we have to be permitted to do what is sub-optimal *and* permitted to do what is best. We must reject the claim, made for example by Colin McGinn, that we have 'a moral obligation to be morally perfect.'[1] Thus, moral theories that demand that we do what is morally best leave no room for the supererogatory. Let us call these "maximizing theories". A classic moral theory of this kind is maximizing act-consequentialism (from hereon, simply "consequentialism") whereby every act[2] is either morally required (if it leads to the best consequences) or morally forbidden (if it doesn't).[3] In this paper, I argue that maximizing theories like consequentialism are at best counter-productive and thus that, by its own lights, a theory that wants us to do what is best ought at the very least to tell us to believe that some actions are supererogatory.

I begin with an argument that gets close to the mark: the argument from autonomy. I outline this argument in §1. While I demonstrate this argument fails in its attempt to establish the *theoretical* value of the supererogatory, it nevertheless proves

[1] Colin McGinn, 'Must I Be Morally Perfect?', *Analysis* 52, no. 1 (1992), pp. 32-4, at 33.

[2] More specifically, every act that is not morally indifferent. Some have presented arguments for why we ought to consider some actions to be beyond the realm of moral evaluation (Dale Dorsey, 'Amorality', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19, no. 2 (2016), pp. 329-42.) However, there are those who are sceptical of classifying any act as morally indifferent (for arguments to this effect, see for example my 'Over-Demandingness Objections and Supererogation', *The Limits of Moral Obligation*, ed. Marcel van Ackeren and Michael Kühler, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory (New York and London, 2016), pp. 68-83, at 73-4.) For them, then moral requirements on a maximizing theory are even more pervasive and confining.

[3] The actual demandingness of a particular moral theory depends not only on whether or not it is a maximizing theory, but also on its theory of value. So, a theory that only requires that we do not harm but considers all other actions to be equally good could, it is true, avoid the problems outlined in this paper. However, such a theory would rely on an implausibly course-grained theory of value. Thus, such theories are not the target of this paper.

to be instructive: it distinguishes the obligatory from the supererogatory in terms of whether or not sanctions are appropriate for omissions. I argue that this distinction has important implications for our motivations, not as a matter of conceptual necessity (as the argument from autonomy supposes) but as a matter of psychological fact. Thus, in §2, I draw on the literature on psychological perfectionism to illuminate the *practical* repercussions of believing oneself to be required to do what is best. I argue that psychological perfectionism is the non-moral analogue of a moral theory that requires us to do what is best and that the evidence demonstrates that by imposing high (non-moral) standards on themselves, perfectionists actually make it less likely that they will reach their goals. I argue that this gives us reason to believe that, similarly, *requiring* agents to meet exceedingly high *moral* standards will have the effect of making them less likely to meet them. Finally, in §3, I explore the scope of this problem. I show that it is similar in structure to other problems raised for maximizing theories, like the paradox of hedonism. Thus, the problem I raise here is open to similar responses. Nevertheless, I demonstrate that, at the very least, a moral theory on which there are no supererogatory actions ought to tell us to *believe* that there are.

1 THE ARGUMENT FROM AUTONOMY

As Michael Clark states, an adequate account of supererogation has to answer two questions: (i) what makes it permissible to refrain from those acts classified as supererogatory and (ii) why it is nonetheless good to perform them.[4] This is the

[4] Michael Clark, 'The Meritorious and the Mandatory', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79 (1978), pp. 23-33, at 29.

classic puzzle at the heart of the so-called "paradox of supererogation".[5] Any defence of supererogation requires an answer. Clark argues that the answer to the first question lies in 'the independent value of personal autonomy.'[6] Appealing to autonomy has become a classic response from those wishing to defend the concept of supererogation.[7] It is by considering this argument—the argument from autonomy, as I will call it— that we can begin to think about exactly how we should understand the relationship between constraints and requirements on the one hand and freedom and options on the other. It is this relationship that I use to build the central argument of this paper, which I present in §3. Understanding the similarities and differences between the argument from autonomy and my position will reveal the short-comings of the former and help elucidate the latter. I turn now to examining the argument from autonomy in more detail.

Maximizing theories fail to make room for the supererogatory because they leave no room for optional actions. More specifically, they leave no room for the possibility of some optional actions being better than others. It is possible for even maximizing theories to allow for many options by allowing more than one action to be tied as morally best. However, it should be noted that the opportunity for such ties will be limited depending on the theory of value involved and how finely grained it is. On a standard utilitarian view, it is likely that there will be very few ties. Furthermore, even with the existence of options, maximizing theories allow no room for supererogation because even if there are options available to the agent, it is not the

[5] For an exposition of the "paradox" see Terry Horgan and Mark Timmons, 'Untying a Knot from the Inside Out: Reflections on the "Paradox" of Supererogation', *Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation* 27, no. 2 (June 16, 2010), pp. 29-63.
[6] Clark, 'The Meritorious and the Mandatory', p. 29.
[7] In addition to Clark, there is also Joseph Raz, 'Permissions and Supererogation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1975), pp. 161-8; David Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy (Cambridge, 1982).

case that some are morally better than others.[8] Thus, the key to defending the possibility of supererogatory actions is to argue for the existence of options *for reasons other than the actions in question being equally good*. The argument from autonomy purports to do just that.

Given that optionality is what distinguishes supererogatory acts from obligatory acts, it makes sense when looking for arguments for the supererogatory to look to the value of optional actions. The value of an action being optional rather than obligatory gives a reason in favour of options that is not based on the action in question being equally as good as other options. The argument challenges the deontic part of the maximizing theory that says we are required to do what is morally best. Autonomy simply gives us a permission such that we are not morally *obliged* to do what is morally best. Therefore, it is a justification for the option of performing sub-optimal actions.[9] It therefore allows for some options to be better than others, and thus for the possibility of acting supererogatorily. I turn now to exploring the relationship between optionality and autonomy.

So the argument from autonomy begins by locating the value of supererogatory acts in 'the freedom of the individual involved in purely optional choice.'[10] The importance of optional actions is cashed out in terms of the value of *autonomy* which, theorists like David Heyd argue, 'can be realized only under conditions of complete freedom and would be stifled under a more totalitarian concept

[8] For more on this, see my 'Over-Demandingness Objections and Supererogation'.
[9] There have been attempts to make room for the value of having options on a consequentialist framework by changing the axiological rankings of options, often by having dual rankings. Jussi Suikkanen, for example, gives an argument similar to the argument from autonomy and argues that the solution is to reformulate consequentialism such that it is sensitive to the value of having options (Jussi Suikkanen, 'Consequentialist Options', *Utilitas* 26, no. 3 (2014), pp. 276-302.) On his theory, room is left for supererogatory action because the actions in the set of available options have a range of values.
[10] Heyd, *Supererogation*, p. 166.

of duty.'[11] Therefore, the optionality of supererogatory actions allows for the realization of the value of autonomy. As Jonathan Dancy states in his discussion of Michael Clark's autonomy-based argument for the supererogatory, 'It is the optionality that is crucial.'[12]

However, it is not enough that supererogatory actions allow for the exercise of our autonomy. In order to make an argument *against* maximizing theories like consequentialism that do not make room for the supererogatory, the following claim must be defended: supererogatory actions, in virtue of their optionality, are autonomous *in a way obligatory actions fail to be*. There is a tempting analogy to motivate such a claim: just as physical compulsion undermines *voluntariness*, the moral compulsion that accompanies obligatory acts undermines our ability to freely choose to perform them. Thus, the disvalue in terms of autonomy of an action's being obligatory is analogous to the disvalue of an action's being non-voluntary. This argument has some initial plausibility. There does seem to be something importantly valuable about a friend *choosing* to help us rather than simply being obliged to do so. I thus begin by exploring the related notions of voluntariness and optionality. I then outline the motivation for the argument for autonomy based on the analogy between voluntariness and optionality. At the end of this section I demonstrate that this very analogy in fact gives us good reason to *reject* the argument from autonomy's claim that optional actions allow for the exercise of our autonomy in a way that obligatory actions fail to.

[11] Heyd, p. 175.
[12] Jonathan Dancy, 'Supererogation and Moral Realism', *Human Agency*, ed. Jonathan Dancy, J. M. E. Moravcsik, and C. C. W. Taylor (Stanford, 1988), pp. 170-88, at 183.

1.1 Optionality and Voluntariness

First, let us get a better understanding of the ways in which optional and obligatory acts differ.

The language of obligations mirrors that of necessity. Obligatory actions are things that we *must* do. If we are morally required to do something, then we *have to* do it. This can be contrasted with the broader notion of "ought". Consider the following sign: "After using the bathroom, everybody ought to wash their hands; employees have to."[13] There is nothing redundant in the second claim.

The fact that we *have* to do what we are obliged to do means that we are forbidden from failing to perform an obligatory action. Failures to perform obligatory acts constitute serious moral failings. Failing to do what we are obliged to do can say something about us much more generally: if I tell a lie, then I am a liar; if I commit an act of murder, then I am a murderer. All the occasions on which I have not lied or have not murdered do not count equally heavily against those occasions on which I have. In addition, when we fail to do what is obligatory, sanctions of some form are appropriate.[14] Which sanctions are appropriate varies, from informal pressure and blame to punishment.[15]

Obligations therefore stand in contrast to the supererogatory. Like obligatory acts, it is permissible to perform supererogatory acts. However, unlike obligatory acts, it is also permissible to fail to perform supererogatory acts. Thus, supererogatory acts

[13] This example comes from Kai Von Fintel and Sabine Iatridou, 'How to Say Ought in Foreign: The Composition of Weak Necessity Modals', *Time and Morality*, ed. J. Guéron and J. Lecarme, vol. 75, Studies in Natural Language and Linguistic Theory (Dordrecht, 2008), pp. 115-41, at 116.

[14] Heyd argues for such a view. So too does Mary Forrester, who defines obligations in terms of sanctions, claiming that an act is obligatory if and only if some sanction is appropriate for failures to perform them (Mary Forrester, 'Some Remarks on Obligation, Permission, and Supererogation', *Ethics* 85, no. 3 (1975), pp. 219-26, at 220.)

[15] Of course, this does not mean that *all* de facto sanctions and punishment indicate true obligations. The mere fact that a bully, or a community, demand we perform a certain action on pain of some sanction does not make that action morally obligatory. The sanctions must be justified.

are *optional*: they are neither morally required nor morally forbidden. Due to the optionality of supererogatory acts, omissions of supererogatory acts do not deserve the sanctions and punishment incurred by failures to perform obligatory acts.[16] Performances of supererogatory acts count much more heavily than non-performances. In this sense, moral compulsion (the shutting off of alternative courses of actions that would be morally acceptable) accompanies obligatory acts, but not supererogatory ones. Thus, there seems to be an important similarity between moral and physical compulsion, which grounds a comparison between optionality and voluntariness.

Optionality and voluntariness seem to be related concepts. At some points, Heyd, one of the main proponents of the argument from autonomy, does draw a distinction between these two notions.[17] For example, he builds optionality and voluntariness into two separate conditions of his account of supererogation.[18] However, in many places he appears to equate these notions. For example, at one point, he claims that the value of supererogatory acts consists in their being 'totally optional and voluntary,' while in other places saying that these actions are valuable *solely* because of their optionality.[19] Additionally, in several examples he runs these notions together. He describes the system of taxation in Ancient Greece as *voluntary*.[20] However, his explanation of why this system had supererogatory elements is better understood as appealing to the *optionality* of the payments made. In the case of blood donation, Heyd remarks that the particular value and importance of

[16] Of course, some sanctions might be appropriate due to a negative *agent* assessment (due to the reason that they omitted the supererogatory action) or because of the act that the agent performed *instead* of the supererogatory act. Nevertheless, it is not the case that sanctions are legitimate for a non-performance of a supererogatory act *qua* supererogatory act.
[17] Heyd, *Supererogation*, p. 175.
[18] Heyd, p. 115.
[19] Heyd, p. 9.
[20] Heyd, p. 39.

these acts is that they are purely *voluntary*.[21] However, he then says that people's 'freedom to give [blood] voluntarily' is severely curtailed 'in a system which makes giving obligatory,' that is, when such acts are not *optional*.[22]

The running together of these two notions is revealing: as I will show, it is initially tempting to draw an analogy between the voluntary and the optional, and thus between the non-voluntary and the required.

1.2 The Lack of Alternative Possibilities

Imagine that a bank robber puts a gun to your head and demands that you give them the money from your safe. In this situation, there is reason to think that your handing over the money is non-voluntary. The explanation we might offer for this is that there were no acceptable alternatives to handing over the money. There seems to be an analogous situation in the moral case. When we are morally required to keep a promise, there is no morally acceptable alternative to keeping it. That is what it is for an action to be obligatory. Thus, it might be thought that the non-optionality of morally required actions has a disvalue similar to the disvalue of non-voluntary acts: they are both bad from the point of view of autonomy. Thus the argument from autonomy rests on the assumption that a lack of acceptable alternatives does in fact undermine voluntariness. This is to accept the Principle of Alternative Possibilities with respect to voluntariness: a person performs an action voluntarily only if there are acceptable alternatives to performing that act.[23] However, I argue that this principle is

[21] Heyd, p. 148 and 180.
[22] Heyd, p. 180.
[23] This principle was discussed by Harry Frankfurt in terms of moral responsibility (Harry G. Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969), pp. 829-39, at 829.) He rejects it (see his discussion of the case of Black and Jones (Frankfurt, 835.) I apply it here to the case of voluntariness and reject it for similar reasons.

false and thus, that the argument from autonomy fails to establish a value unique to the supererogatory.

1.3 Voluntariness without Alternative Possibilities

The Principle of Alternative Possibilities ought to be rejected: a person may freely choose to perform an action even if there are no acceptable alternatives to doing so, because this fact need not play any role in their decision. Serena Olsaretti has developed an account of voluntariness based on this thought. On her account, an act is non-voluntary if and only if it is performed *because* the alternatives that the chooser believes she faces are not acceptable, where an alternative is "acceptable" if it conforms to some objective standard (e.g. well-being).[24] A voluntary act is one that is not non-voluntary.

Imagine that you are living in a city in a desert. It is so far from any other city that, if you tried to leave, you would die of thirst before you reached anywhere else. There are, therefore, no acceptable alternatives to staying in the city. If you stay in the city *because* of this fact then, Olsaretti argues, you do so non-voluntarily.[25] There are, therefore, two features necessary for an act to be non-voluntary. The first is that there *are* no acceptable alternatives. The second is that the course of action taken is taken *because* there are no acceptable alternatives. Thus, you could stay in the city in the

[24] Serena Olsaretti, 'Debate: The Concept of Voluntariness—A Reply', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 112-21. In response to Ben Colburn's point about well-informedness (Ben Colburn, 'Debate: The Concept of Voluntariness', *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 101-11, at 102.), Olsaretti accepts that factual beliefs about the availability of options can indeed make a difference to voluntariness, but re-emphasizes that mistaken *evaluative* judgements (such as the mistaken belief that not living on caviar would reduce you below an acceptable standard of well-being) do *not* make a difference to voluntariness. This is reflected in the definition of non-voluntariness given here. For simplicity, in the rest of this paper, I use 'a lack of acceptable alternatives' to refer to 'a lack of (objectively) acceptable options that the agent (subjectively) believes she faces.'

[25] Serena Olsaretti, *Liberty, Dersert and the Market* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 138-9.

desert voluntarily if it were the case that you could leave without dying of thirst. However, it is also possible for you to stay in the city in the desert voluntarily, despite the lack of acceptable alternatives to doing so, *provided you have different reasons for staying*, such as enjoying the city, the presence of your friends and family or satisfying job in the city, a lack of desire to see any other parts of the world, and so on, such that the lack of acceptable alternatives plays no part in your motivation.

There is a lesson to be learned here about optionality. It is true that an obligatory act has a lack of morally acceptable alternatives. However, just as we can *voluntarily* choose to perform an act, despite the lack of prudentially acceptable alternatives, similarly we can *autonomously* choose to perform an obligatory act, despite the fact that there are no morally acceptable alternatives. This is because, as I will go on to discuss, we can perform an obligatory act for reasons other than the fact that there are no morally acceptable alternatives.

1.4 Two Types of Motivation to do our Duty

Suppose that I promise to give you a lift home after a party we are both attending. The party comes to an end and you ask me for the lift I promised. I could give you the lift as promised because you would be really angry if I refused and would tell other people that I refused to give you a lift despite promising to do so, perhaps leading other friends to consider me a bad person and treat me accordingly. So one possible motivation for giving you a lift would be to avoid all of these negative consequences. Alternatively, I could give you the lift because of the reasons that make it my duty to do so: that I have promised and that I promised because you have no other way of getting home.

Thus, we can do the right thing because of the considerations that make it the right thing to do or we can do the right thing in order to avoid negative consequences that would be appropriate if we didn't.[26] This distinction is important because, once we have it in mind, we can see that the argument from autonomy would only work if we could *only* be motivated to do what is best *because* of the negative repercussions that would ensue if we failed to do so. However, there is no reason to suppose that, conceptually speaking, this is the only possible source of motivation. Moreover, suppose that what is best on a certain occasion would be to give someone a gift. Most people believe this to be supererogatory—and thus that they are not required to do so—and yet many people still give gifts. If it were the case that we could only be motivated to do what is best because of negative repercussions, then we would never perform acts we thought to be supererogatory for which there are no negative repercussions. We must conclude, therefore, that it is in principle possible to be motivated by considerations other than that an act is morally required.

Therefore, just as an action can be voluntary if we are motivated for a reason *other than* the fact that there are no acceptable alternatives, we can be motivated to do our duty for reasons aside from the lack of morally acceptable alternatives. In recognizing this, we recognize that no threat to our autonomy need result from our doing our duty as a matter of conceptual necessity, even while accepting that justified sanctions would accompany the failure to do so.

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[26] This distinction can be found in Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, 1998). On his view, being motivated by the sanctions that are made appropriate by a failure to do our duty is in fact to act heteronomously. Christine Korsgaard gives the example of paying your taxes 'because you are afraid of being punished if you do not. This is heteronomy [as opposed to autonomy]: your interest in avoiding punishment binds you to the law.' (Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 22.) However, we do not need to buy into a Kantian account of duty or autonomy to see that there are two ways we could be motivated to do our duty.

2 PSYCHOLOGICAL PERFECTIONISM

At the heart of the argument from autonomy is the contrast between the force and compulsion of our obligations and the freedom and choice of supererogatory actions. The argument from autonomy tries to use this contrast to give a theoretical reason to include the supererogatory in our ethical theories: any theory without the supererogatory would fail to make room for the proper exercise of our autonomy. It was supposed to provide the answer to Clark's first question, namely how it could be permissible for us to do less than the best. However, the argument, as we have seen, ultimately fails: we can act autonomously even when doing our duty.

Nevertheless, the failure of the argument from autonomy does not mean we should abandon the impulse to contrast the constraints of requirements with the freedom of having choices. Thus, while I have offered a critique of the argument from autonomy, it is from its very building blocks that I construct a new justification for the supererogatory. Unlike the argument from autonomy, my argument here does not rely on any conceptual connection between sanctions and optionality, nor does it rely on an appeal to autonomy or its value. Instead, I demonstrate the *practical* repercussions of trying to lead a life in which we are required to do what is best and thus establish the practical (rather than theoretical) value of the supererogatory.[27]

The argument from autonomy relies on the claim that when we do our duty we are necessarily motivated by the negative consequences of failing to do so. My claim is more limited. I believe that psychological reality is such that excessive moral requirements make agents more likely to be motivated by a fear of sanctions. While it is still theoretically possible to be motivated by other reasons than the lack of

[27] Thus, my argument here can be seen as compatible with—or even supplementary to—the search for a theoretical justification of supererogation.

acceptable alternatives, being required to do the best takes a psychological toll. Knowing that even the smallest deviation from a particular course of action will lead to the legitimating of sanctions is likely to have an effect on an agent. Even if you are motivated to do what is right, having a moral gun to the head (so to speak) can make doing so much more difficult psychologically speaking. These considerations give us a practical argument for the supererogatory.

I begin by giving an account of psychological perfectionism. By revealing the parallels between the language of perfectionism and the language of obligations, I demonstrate that perfectionism is the non-moral analogue of a moral theory on which the best is required. I use this analogy to argue that the consequences of perfectionism would likely be the consequences of adhering to such a moral theory: counter-productivity. Finally, I show that the solution in the moral case is supererogation.

2.1 The Language of Perfectionism

The "perfectionism" of interest here is psychological perfectionism, a separate notion from the "perfectionism" we might find in moral, political or value theory. In a definition that captures the heart of psychological perfectionism, Randy O. Frost et al. describe it as the setting of excessively high standards that are accompanied by overly critical evaluations of one's own behaviour.[28] Readers may be all too familiar with this phenomenon. There are three main components of perfectionism that reveal important similarities between perfectionism and maximizing theories that demand the best.

[28] Randy O. Frost et al., 'The Dimensions of Perfectionism', *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 14, no. 5 (October 1990), pp. 449-68, at 450.

Firstly, perfectionists believe themselves to be subject to rules and requirements. Indeed, perfectionism has been characterized as the "tyranny of the shoulds".[29] Moreover, these standards and rules have the same form of strong necessity as moral obligations: for a perfectionist, it is not just that "I ought to be working all the time", but "I *have to* be working all the time"; it is not just that "my talk ought to be perfect", but "my talk *must* be perfect." Thus, it feels to perfectionists, just as it does to those who take themselves to be under a moral requirement, that it is *unacceptable to do otherwise*.

Secondly, due to the prescriptive force of these standards, perfectionists are preoccupied with what is referred to as "concern over mistakes": a fear of failing to meet the standards in question. Perfectionism thus involves the belief 'that doing something perfectly (i.e. mistake-free) is not only possible, but also necessary.'[30] Many studies demonstrate that perfectionism is 'associated with a fear of failure and an inability to tolerate failure.'[31] In fact, one of the therapeutic techniques used to help those with perfectionism is to ask them to think about the "or…" that follows a statement that begins with "I must" or "I should" or "I have to". So "I must read absolutely everything on this subject before starting my work" might be followed by "or my colleagues will think I am stupid and lazy." "I have to be working all the time" might be followed by "or I will fail all my exams and no one will ever give me a job."

[29] Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth* (New York, 1950).
[30] Obsessive Compulsive Cognitions Working Group, 'Cognitive Assessment of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 35, no. 7 (1997), pp. 667-81.
[31] Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt, 'Positive Versus Negative Perfectionism in Psychopathology: A Comment on Slade and Owens's Dual Process Model', *Behavior Modification* 30, no. 4 (July 2006), pp. 472-95, at 481. See also Gordon L. Flett et al., 'Components of Perfectionism and Procrastination in College Students', *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 20, no. 2 (1992), pp. 85-94; Gordon L. Flett et al., 'Perfectionism, Self-Actualization, and Personal Adjustment', *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 6 (1991), pp. 147-60.

This concern over mistakes, central to psychological perfectionism, echoes important features of moral requirements. Just as in the case of failures to meet our obligations, perfectionists believe that blame, criticism and punishment are legitimated by failures to meet the standards set. Moreover, perfectionists believe that even small failure will have—or legitimates—*serious* negative consequences. The sense of catastrophe that accompanies the prospect of failure is often due to the fact that the person's entire evaluation of their self-worth—as a person, family member or an employee—'is contingent on the pursuit and attainment of their goals.'[32] Thus, evidence shows that perfectionists exhibit a cognitive bias that is caused by concern over mistakes whereby selective attention is paid to failures, whereas successes are discounted.[33] This is similar to the way in which violations of moral requirements (such as murder) are viewed as of much more significance than all the times in which moral requirements were met. Thus, the non-moral requirements of perfectionists mirror moral requirements.

Thirdly, psychological perfectionism is more than just the setting of requirements: it is the setting of *excessively high* requirements, which are difficult to achieve and highly curtail what counts as an acceptable course of action. In this way, perfectionism is the non-moral analogue of maximizing theories in that they both demand our best and consider all else to be unacceptable.

Drawing out these similarities is instructive because, as I go on to show, the well-documented consequences of being a perfectionist strongly suggest that by

[32] Roz Shafran, Zafra Cooper, and Christopher G. Fairburn, 'Clinical Perfectionism: A Cognitive-Behavioural Analysis', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 40 (July 2002), pp. 773-91, at 778.
[33] Shafran, Cooper, and Fairburn, p. 782. For further evidence of this see M.M. Antony and R.P. Swinson, *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping with Perfectionism* (Oakland, CA, 1998); David D. Burns, 'The Perfectionist's Script for Self-Defeat', *Psychology Today*, 1980, pp. 34-51; Don E. Hamachek, 'Psychodynamics of Normal and Neurotic Perfectionism', *Psychology* 15 (1978), pp. 27-33; M.H. Hollender, 'Perfectionism', *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 6 (1965), pp. 94-103.

requiring that we meet an excessively high moral standard, it is made less likely that we actually meet these standards.

2.2 The Counter-Productivity of Perfectionism

Perfectionism is usually considered to be a psychopathology: something that requires addressing in order for the person in question to have a healthy and satisfying life. This is predominantly because of the correlation between perfectionism and depression and anxiety. This correlation arises because of the role that sanctions and self-criticism play when we believe ourselves to be required to meet excessively high standards, which leads to a 'morbid fear of failure.'[34] This correlation with anxiety and depression is exacerbated if the requirements are perceived to come from sources outside oneself.[35] Similarly, the consequences of believing ourselves to be *morally* obliged to do what is morally best are likely to be depression and anxiety, especially given that moral standards are often viewed as having an external source.

The correlation with anxiety and depression is unsurprising in light of the biases discussed earlier. Whatever we perceive as the source of the requirements, when we are preoccupied with the avoidance of failure and yet hardly notice when we succeed in meeting the standards in question, we are likely to be riddled with fear and guilt. This is true in both the moral and the non-moral spheres.

The anxiety and depression that accompanies a fear of failure should be of some concern to moral theorists in and of itself. However, the real issue is that this

[34] Shafran, Cooper, and Fairburn, 'Clinical Perfectionism', p. 779.
[35] Randy O. Frost et al., 'A Comparison of Two Measures of Perfectionism', *Personality and Individual Differences* 14, no. 1 (1993), pp. 119-26, at 125.

fear is *counter-productive*: by trying to avoid failing to meet the standards, we tend to avoid meeting them.

The evidence for the avoidant behaviour that accompanies of perfectionistic thinking, and the counter-productivity that this entails, is well-documented and has become central to the definition of perfectionism itself. The pursuit of high standards and the attendant fear of failure becomes so aversive that perfectionists can (a) engage is procrastination by delaying the beginning of tasks, (b) abandon tasks midway rather than try and fail to complete them or (c) avoid the tasks completely.[36] In fact, even when perfectionists engage in (rather than avoid) tasks, they can exhibit 'an inability to know when to quit' and persist in tasks 'beyond the point of reason'.[37] This also constitutes a form of counter-productivity. This lack of responsiveness to the consequences of their actions means that perfectionists typically display an inflexibility that leads to a decreased likelihood of achieving their goals. This is especially true as perfectionists not only fail to change their behaviour in response to failing to meet their standards, they also fail 'to relinquish standards even when they are not met and result in adverse consequences.'[38] More worryingly, perhaps, is that these adverse consequences 'may not be viewed by the person as aversive since they may be interpreted as evidence of true striving' even if it means they are less likely to reach the goals they are striving for.[39] Thus, the literature on psychological perfectionism demonstrates that the exceedingly high standards lead to a fear of failure and this fear in turn leads to counter-productivity.

[36] Shafran, Cooper, and Fairburn, 'Clinical Perfectionism', p. 782.
[37] Flett and Hewitt, 'Positive Versus Negative Perfectionism', p. 485.
[38] Shafran, Cooper, and Fairburn, 'Clinical Perfectionism', p. 778.
[39] Shafran, Cooper, and Fairburn, p. 778.

The literature on perfectionism demonstrates that for perfectionistic thinking to be counter-productive the person in question does *not* need to consider themselves to be required to do what is best in *every* area of their life. For example, a university student can engage in counter-productive behaviour when they are perfectionistic about their essays, even if they are not perfectionistic about, say, cooking or sending cards to their siblings on their birthday. Furthermore, it demonstrates that perfectionism entails counter-productivity in a wide range of contexts, from work, to family, to social interactions. Take, for example, the religious context. Those with "scrupulosity" believe themselves to be subject to overly-stringent *religious* requirements and suffer from debilitating guilt and fear about transgressing these requirements: 'fearing sin where there is none'.[40] The fear generated by taking themselves to be required to meet exceedingly high religious standards causes those with scrupulosity to engage in counterproductive behaviour that actually *interferes* with 'social, occupational, and religious functioning'.[41] Ironically, patients suffering from severe and long-term scrupulosity, rather than avoiding sins (as is their stated goal), in fact often surrender to 'the urge to commit the sin.'[42]

On the theories like a maximizing moral theory, on any occasion where we can act, we are required to do what is best and are forbidden from doing otherwise. We are required to do the moral best in *every* case. And when all morally significant actions are circumscribed by duty, trying to live a life free of moral errors is like

[40] Jonathan S. Abramowitz and Ryan J. Jacoby, 'Scrupulosity: A Cognitive-Behavioral Analysis and Implications for Treatment', *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders* 3, no. 2 (2014), pp. 140-9, at140.

[41] Jonathan S. Abramowitz et al., 'Religious Obsessions and Compulsions in a Non-Clinical Sample: The Penn Inventory of Scrupulosity (PIOS)', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 40, no. 7 (2002), pp. 825-38, at 826. See also Abramowitz and Jacoby, 'Scrupulosity', p. 145.

[42] J. A. Ciarrocchi, *The Doubting Disease: Help for Scrupulosity and Religious Compulsions* (Mahwah, NJ, 1995), p. 36. Cited in Chris H. Miller and Dawson W. Hedges, 'Scrupulosity Disorder: An Overview and Introductory Analysis', *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 22, no. 6 (2008), pp. 1042-58, at 1046.

trying to walk along a tightrope over a chasm: any small deviation has serious, negative consequences. Thus, the requirement to do what is morally best is likely to lead to what Michael Stocker calls "moral schizophrenia." This involves 'a split between one's motives and one's reasons [values or justification].'[43] This split can come in the form of two different "maladies of the spirit": in the first, we fail to be moved by what we value; in the second, we do not value what moves us.[44] Practically speaking, on theories without the supererogatory, whereby every act is either morally required or morally forbidden, we are likely to exhibit one or both of the maladies Stocker describes. Suffering from either of these "maladies" means that people are unlikely to be motivated by the demands of these theories, and thus are likely to be motivated instead by the fear of sanctions that are legitimated by the failure to meet those requirements. And we can predict that being motivated by fear of sanctions in the moral realm—just as in the cases of perfectionism in the non-moral realm—will lead to fear and anxiety.

We can, therefore, also predict that adherents to maximizing moral theories would engage in counter-productive behaviour, just like psychological perfectionists.[45] Agents may well avoid situations in which they can be called on to do

[43] Michael Stocker, 'The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories', *The Journal of Philosophy* 73, no. 14 (1976), pp. 453-66, at 454.
[44] Stocker, pp. 453-4.
[45] There are cases of heroic actions—such as those individuals in the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon who sheltered Jews from persecution during WWII—where people did not see their actions of supererogatory. This might be taken as evidence for the motivational power of moral requirements. However, it should be noted that in none of these cases were the individuals motivated by a duty *to do what is morally best*. Their actions are better understood as coming from a sense of 'moral necessity': it felt impossible for them to do other than they did (for a defence of this claim and for a discussion of moral necessity in relation to supererogation, see Kyle Fruh, 'Practical Necessity and Moral Heroism', in *Oxford Studies in Agency and Responsibility*, ed. David Shoemaker, vol. 4 (Oxford, 2017); Alfred Archer and Michael Ridge, 'The Heroism Paradox: Another Paradox of Supererogation', *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 6 (2015), pp. 1575-92.) Nevertheless, my argument is compatible with there being some cases in which believing that heroic action is obligatory brings about a better outcome than if it were believed to be supererogatory. Being required to do something may well motivate some people on some occasions. However, the evidence presented here demonstrates that being required to do what is

good. This could take many forms, such as wilful ignorance whereby we avoid finding out about the suffering of others; or avoiding situations whereby we are called upon to do good; or refraining from making promises or commitments so that we don't add further requirements to our already heavy load. Just as a perfectionist might spend so much time trying to perfect an email that in the end they never send it, someone who believes it to be required that they give money to the *best* or most efficient charity may spend so much time working out which one this is that they fail to give any money at all.[46]

This counter-productive behaviour—a consequence of fear generated by considering ourselves to be required to do what is best—gives us reason to suppose that if doing good is what we are interested in, then morally requiring what is best will more than likely hinder that pursuit.[47]

2.3 Therapeutic Solutions: Positive Perfectionism and Supererogation

The therapeutic solution to negative perfectionism is to encourage perfectionists to acknowledge that there is a state of being "good enough" or performing a task "well enough" that is below doing one's utmost or one's best. They must therefore lower the standards they believe themselves required to meet. Doing this opens up the way for *exceeding* those standards.

Thus, two types of perfectionistic tendencies have been distinguished in the literature: (1) negative perfectionism, which is the type described so far in this paper, is characterized by perfectionistic *concern*; and (2) positive perfectionism,

morally best on all occasions is in general counter-productive. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for this journal for encouraging me to discuss these cases.

[46] Something that should worry those in the Effective Altruism movement.

[47] Clark articulates a suspicion similar to this (Michael Clark, 'On Wanting to Be Morally Perfect', *Analysis* 53, no. 1 (1993), pp. 54-6, at 55.). I give evidence that supports this suspicion.

characterized by perfectionistic *striving*.[48] The therapeutic solution to negative perfectionism is not *non*-perfectionism but *positive* perfectionism: to *aim* to be better without believing oneself to be *required* to do so.

The solution in the moral case is the same: we must lower the moral standards such that we are permitted to perform what is best, but also permitted to less than the best. Like in the non-moral case, this opens up the way for exceeding what is required. By reducing what we take to be required, we allow for optional actions, some of which are better than others. In other words, the solution is the supererogatory. Just as negative perfectionism is the analogue of a moral theory that requires us to do the best, positive perfectionism is the analogue of a moral theory that allows for supererogatory acts.

The literature on positive perfectionism demonstrates that when the defining feature of negative perfectionism—concern over mistakes—is removed, as in the case

[48] This distinction between positive and negative perfectionism has its origins in Hamachek's seminal work in which he distinguishing two related but separable clusters of features ambiguously subsumed under the term 'perfectionism' (Hamachek, 'Psychodynamics of Normal and Neurotic Perfectionism'). Since then, many other theorists have also accepted the distinction between these two types of perfectionism, though there is little agreement on nomenclature. I follow Terry-Short et al., in talking about positive and negative perfectionism ('Positive and Negative Perfectionism', *Personality and Individual Differences* 18, no. 5 (1995), pp. 663-8.) characterized by what Stoeber and Otto call perfectionistic striving and perfectionistic concern ('Positive Conceptions of Perfectionism: Approaches, Evidence, Challenges', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 4 (2006), pp. 295-319.). In other places, the following terms have been used: 'normal and neurotic perfectionism' (Hamachek, 'Psychodynamics of Normal and Neurotic Perfectionism'); 'positive striving and maladaptive evaluative concern' (Frost et al., 'A Comparison of Two Measures of Perfectionism'); 'active and passive perfectionism' (Karen Kittler Adkins and Wayne Parker, 'Perfectionism and Suicidal Preoccupation', *Journal of Personality* 64, no. 2 (1996), pp. 529-43.); 'adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism' (K.G. Rice, J.S. Ashby, and R.B. Slaney, 'Self-Esteem as a Mediator between Perfectionism and Depression: A Structural Equation Analysis', *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 45 (1998), pp. 304-14.); 'functional and dysfunctional perfectionism' (Josée Rhéaume et al., 'Functional and Dysfunctional Perfectionists: Are They Different on Compulsive-Like Behaviors?', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 38 (2000), pp. 119-28.); 'healthy and unhealthy perfectionism' (H. Stumpf and W.D. Parker, 'A Hierarchical Structural Analysis of Perfectionism and Its Relation to Other Personality Characteristics', *Personality and Individual Differences* 28 (2000), pp. 837-52.); 'personal standards and evaluative concerns perfectionism' (Kirk R. Blankstein and David M. Dunkley, 'Evaluative Concerns, Self-Critical, and Personal Standards Perfectionism: A Structural Equation Modeling Strategy', in *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, ed. Gordon L Flett and Paul L Hewitt (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 285-315.); and 'conscientious and self-evaluative perfectionism' (R.W. Hill et al., 'A New Measure of Perfectionism: The Perfectionism Inventory', *Journal of Personality Assessment* 82 (2004), pp. 80-91.).

of positive perfectionism, the possibility of healthier individuals is revealed: individuals who are more motivated and more successful. Anxiety and fear is only associated with perfectionistic concern, not perfectionistic striving.[49]

Amongst the extensive list given by Stoeber and Otto are the following key findings: perfectionistic striving without perfectionistic concern is correlated with *higher* levels of conscientiousness,[50] extraversion, endurance, positive affect, satisfaction with life, and achievement in general as well as specifically academic achievement; additionally, it is correlated with *lower* levels of depression, self-blame, anxiety, procrastination, defensiveness, and maladaptive coping styles.[51] These same consequences, we can predict, would also follow from a life following a moral theory that made room for the supererogatory.

An important finding is that achievability has a large part to play in productive behaviour. Problems arise for perfectionists because they feel *required* to achieve goals that are extremely difficult to achieve. Negative perfectionists 'establish unreasonably high personal standards' and this leads to inevitable failure.[52] For positive perfectionism, on the other hand, what is *required* is in fact attainable: perfectionism only remains adaptive when people avoid 'the daily experience of achievement setbacks' as those who 'experience achievement failures are

[49] See Stoeber and Otto's comprehensive literature review of the studies that distinguish positive and negative perfectionism ('Positive Conceptions of Perfectionism'). Frost et al. found the same through the employment of the Positive Affect-Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) detailed by Watson et al. in 'Development and Validation of Brief Measures of Positive Affect: The PANAS Scales', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54 (1988), pp. 1063-70. Frost et al. found that perfectionistic striving was correlated with 'feelings of energy, enthusiasm, and activity,' whereas perfectionistic concern was correlated with 'feelings of anger, fear, guilt, etc.' (Frost et al., 'A Comparison of Two Measures of Perfectionism', p. 121.).

[50] Also shown in David M. Dunkley et al., 'Personal Standards and Evaluative Concerns Dimensions Of "clinical" perfectionism: A Reply to Shafran et Al. (2002, 2003) and Hewitt et Al. (2003)', *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 44 (January 2006), pp. 63-84, at 79. We can see from this that obsessions that lead to great achievements in the arts, sciences or sports are more likely a product of *conscientiousness* rather than taking oneself to be *required* to do so.

[51] Stoeber and Otto, 'Positive Conceptions of Perfectionism', p. 312.

[52] Hamachek, 'Psychodynamics of Normal and Neurotic Perfectionism', p. 28.

substantially at risk for depression and dysphoria.'[53] The standards we are morally required to meet must therefore be achievable in order to avoid being counter-productive.[54]

Once we reach our goals, we receive satisfaction and sometimes praise and other positive feedback. This indicates the importance of recognizing both the metaphorical *carrot*—as well as the stick—as a form of motivation. It is this difference—between positive and negative reinforcement—that marks the distinction between perfectionistic striving and perfectionistic concern.[55]

There is also positive and negative reinforcement in the moral case. As established earlier, there are serious negative consequences for failing to meet obligations. This means that performing our duty is negatively reinforced: it enables us to avoid the punishment that would otherwise be legitimated, such as a sense of moral failing, guilt, shame, punishment and the censure and disappointment of others. However, as established in the non-moral case, it is a mistake to think that negative reinforcement is the only form of motivation. Supererogation provides an alternative mechanism of motivation, involving praise, merit, gratitude and esteem.[56] These consequences encourage the performance of the acts in question more effectively than a fear of failure and the avoidance of punishment.

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[53] Flett and Hewitt, 'Positive Versus Negative Perfectionism', p. 479. See also Paul L. Hewitt and Gordon L. Flett, 'Perfectionism and Stress in Psychopathology', in *Perfectionism: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, ed. Gordon L. Flett and Paul L. Hewitt (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 255-84.

[54] This explains why we do not need to assume that no action is obligatory in order to avoid counter-productivity. I leave aside the issue of where exactly we ought to draw the line between what is obligatory and what is supererogatory.

[55] See the work of B.F. Skinner, the father of Operant Conditioning, for example his 'Superstition in the Pigeon', *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 38 (1948), pp. 168-72. For an interesting discussion of this issue in relation to perfectionism, see P.D. Slade and R.G. Owens, 'A Dual Process Model of Perfectionism Based on Reinforcement Theory', *Behavior Modification* 22 (1998), pp. 372-90.

[56] Some have rejected the claim that praise and gratitude are part of the very definition of supererogation (for example, Alfred Archer, 'Are Acts of Supererogation Always Praiseworthy?', *Theoria* 82, no. 3 (September 2016), pp. 238-55.); nevertheless, they are very often appropriate and as such can positively enforce such behaviour.

Thus, the evidence concerning psychological perfectionism I have presented here implies that, practically speaking, there is something to be said in favour of J.O. Urmson's argument that we should not demand what is beyond the capacity of ordinary men.[57] If what is morally required is beyond the capacities of most people, then most people would experience "daily setbacks" and regular failure which would make the requirements counter-productive. However, Urmson argues that when the law asks too much, as in the case of prohibition of alcohol in America, then 'as people got used to breaking the law a general lowering of respect of the law naturally followed.'[58] I have demonstrated that the psychological mechanism of counter-productivity actually comes from *too great a respect* (in a sense) for the moral law: seriously believing that one deserves to be punished and censured for not doing one's best is what leads to the fear and anxiety and thus the counter-productive behaviour.[59] Furthermore, even if the demands of duty are such that it is *possible* for ordinary people to meet, the mere act of *requiring* the acts in question leads to the *fear* of being unable to meet them and this fear is self-fulfilling: people become less likely to meet their duty the more the fear that they cannot.

3 THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem I have raised in this paper is part of a family of problems that have beset maximizing theories like consequentialism. Another member of this family is described eloquently by William Bennet:

[57] J.O. Urmson, 'Saints and Heroes', in *Moral Concepts*, ed. Joel Feinberg (Oxford, 1969), pp. 60-73, at 70.
[58] Urmson, p. 70.
[59] Though I concede that for some people this anxiety might become unsustainable and thus lead to a refusal to accept the demands of a moral theory that requires them to do the best and thus 'a disregard' for that theory.

> Happiness is like a cat, if you try to coax it or call it, it will avoid you, it will never come. But if you pay it no attention and go about your business, you'll find it rubbing up against your legs and jumping into your lap.[60]

This reveals the paradoxical nature of happiness (and of cats): seeking it directly only makes it more elusive.[61] Similarly, considering ourselves required to do what is best ironically makes us less likely to do what is best. The paradoxical nature of these theories have led some to claim that they are self-defeating: if the theory is false, then we ought not to believe it; but if it is true, then we also ought not to believe it (as by its own lights believing it would be worse than not believing it). It is the same sort of challenge that I present here. By requiring us to do what is best, the psychological evidence suggests that a maximizing theory is self-defeating: even if it is correct, we ought not (by its very own lights) to believe it because this would make us less likely to do what it tell us we ought.

However, the standard response to this family of problems is to separate out two questions: the first is whether 'some theory is the one that we *ought morally* to try to believe' and the second is whether 'this theory is the true, or best, or best justified theory.'[62] These questions are separate, because the theory in question might be true, or best, or best justified and yet not one we ought morally to try to believe. If so, then

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[60] The exact source of this quotation is unknown though uncontroversially attributed to William Bennett, an American politician, political theorist and prolific writer and speaker on ethics, politics and education.

[61] For further discussion, see Henry Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, ed. Jonathan Bennett, 7th ed. (London, 1907).

[62] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1987), p. 43, emphasis in the original. These two questions arise originally in Bernard Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, ed. J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams (Cambridge, 1973), p. 135. Another way of putting this distinction is between a theory as a *criterion of rightness* and an *action-guiding* theory.

the theory in question would not be self-defeating but, rather, "self-effacing": 'it would tell us that we should try to believe, not itself, but some other theory.'[63] Thus, the problem is reduced from being self-defeating to being self-effacing. Similarly, it might be supposed that the evidence gathered in this paper does not suggest that maximizing theories are self-defeating, but rather that they must be self-effacing.

It should be noted, however, that many objections have been raised against the introduction of two-two level moral theories on which what we ought to believe is different from what the theory says is true. Either these theories would require each individual to accept the truth of a certain moral proposition while accepting that, morally speaking, they ought not to believe it to be true or they would have to suppose, like Henry Sidgwick's "Government House" consequentialism, that some people believe the theory to be true, but the majority do not. The first approach involves a morally and practically problematic kind of compartmentalisation; while the second, as Bernard Williams states, expresses a very colonial attitude.[64] In either case, self-effacing theories violate John Rawls' "publicity condition" which states that the truth of a moral theory must be publically acceptable.[65]

Nevertheless, even if one maintains the distinction between the truth of a theory and whether it ought to be believed, and even if the "correct" theory is one on which there are no supererogatory acts, we still *ought to believe* that there are.[66]

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[63] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 40.
[64] A.K. Sen and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 16.
[65] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. Ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), pp. 113n, 115, and 397-8.
[66] Some might worry that the actions that we consider supererogatory would lack their moral value if they were not in fact supererogatory. However, this would only be a worry if we believed that the value of supererogatory actions came from their being optional, rather than from (for example) the morally good nature of the consequences that they bring about (or intend to bring about); they would have this latter value even if they were in fact required but believed to be optional. There are reasons to be sceptical about the claim that the value of supererogatory actions arises from their optionality. For more on this, see Dancy, 'Supererogation and Moral Realism'; Shelly Kagan, 'Does Consequentialism Demand Too Much? Recent Work on the Limits of Obligation', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13, no. 3 (1984), pp. 239-54.

Some moral theories cannot—or need not—maintain such a distinction. For example, rule-utilitarianism or contractualism allow considerations about what it is best to believe our obligations are to influence their determination of what our obligations truly are. For theories such as these, my argument demonstrating the counter-productivity of requiring too much is a reason to take our level of obligation to be less than the best.[67] It is not that we simply ought to *believe* that there are supererogatory acts; on such theories, there really are supererogatory acts.

CONCLUSION

Michael Clark claims that we must not confuse 'the propaganda aspects of morality with morality itself.'[68] In this paper, I openly address the "propaganda aspects" of morality and give a practical argument, one concerned with the psychological reality of our motivations and the practical effects of considering the best to be required. My argument therefore differs from those—such as the argument for autonomy—that try to give a theoretical justification for the supererogatory. This gives my argument some advantages: it has appeal even if we do not buy into the intrinsic value of, for example, autonomy. I therefore avoid an issue that Heyd himself acknowledges: that the value of autonomy is not something that can be proved.[69]

I have demonstrated that requiring the best is counter-productive. This is a problem for any theory that requires us to meet excessively high moral standards—a feature shared by most theories without the supererogatory. This problem may well be a psychological contingency, but that does not make it any less a psychological

[67] I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for encouraging me to make this point more clearly.
[68] Clark, 'The Meritorious and the Mandatory', p. 28. See also Robin Attfield, 'Supererogation and Double Standards', *Mind* 88, no. 352 (1979), pp. 481-99, at 482-3.
[69] Heyd, *Supererogation*, p. 183.

reality. The solution to this counter-productivity is to lower the standards that agents believe themselves to be required to meet, which in the moral case means allowing that, while it is permissible to do what is best, it is also permissible to do what is good enough: that is, allowing room for the supererogatory.

Therefore, for those who accept the distinction between whether a theory is true and whether it is one we ought to believe, I demonstrate that a moral theory without the supererogatory is self-effacing and thus ought to tell us to *believe* that some actions are supererogatory. For those who reject the distinction, my conclusion is even stronger: that a theory without the supererogatory is self-defeating. Any moral theory that is interested in our doing good and doing better—as surely any moral theory ought to be—should take note that, as the old adage goes, the best is the enemy of the good and that the solution is the supererogatory.[70]

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[70] I thank Rae Langton, Hallvard Lillehammer, Georgie Statham, Tristan Hore, Christine Fears, Shyane Siriwardena, Christina Cameron, Silvia Jonas, Sharon Berry, Olla Solomyak for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I also thank the participants of the Hebrew University Faculty of Philosophy Colloquium as well as the fellows at The Polonsky Academy for Advanced Study. Finally, I am extremely grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for the journal whose comments were encouraging and constructive.